
HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
Historic Landmark Designation Cases No. 11-09

Park Road Courts
1346 Park Road, NW (Square 2843 Lot 10)

Meeting Date: March 22, 2012
Applicant: Urban Investment Partners
Owner: Urban Investment Partners
Affected ANC: ANC 1A
Staff Reviewer: Kim Williams

After careful consideration, staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Review Board designate the apartment building, Park Road Courts at 1346 Park Road, N.W in Columbia Heights as a historic landmark to be entered in the D.C. Inventory of Historic Sites. It is further recommended that the application be forwarded to the National Park Service for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under the Multiple Property Document: *Apartment Buildings in Washington, D.C., 1880-1945*.



Historical and Architectural Background

Park Road Courts building at 1346 Park Road, NW is a three-story (plus basement) buff brick apartment building designed by the architectural firm of Hunter and Bell and built in 1916. The building is designed in a Classical Revival style and is set back from the street in a modified H plan, so that the eastern end wing is at the same plane of the row houses next to it, thereby

continuing the rhythm of the streetscape, while the western wing is recessed from it, leaving a lawn between the building's entrance and the public right-of-way. As originally designed, the building included 21 units, ranging from four to five rooms with baths, large foyers, and porches at the rear of the building.

The apartment building was constructed in Columbia Heights in 1916 at a turning point in the urban development patterns of the neighborhood. Columbia Heights was originally subdivided in 1882 by Senator John Sherman who had the intention of transforming a former nineteenth-century estate into a prosperous residential community. The area's higher elevation and cooler temperatures, its proximity to several streetcar lines, and the subdivision's building restrictions that encouraged sizeable, three-story, single-family dwellings, indeed attracted members of Washington's professional and business classes to the newly platted neighborhood. By 1904, Columbia Heights had emerged as one of the most desirable suburban residential neighborhoods in the city, in large part due to the efforts of the Columbia Heights Citizens Association, a civic organization that promoted and advocated for the neighborhood. However, between 1905 and 1915, the neighborhood began to transition away from its status as a wealthy enclave, as higher density building and a greater influx of commercial activity was introduced into the area.

Although apartment buildings were built as early as the 1890s in Columbia Heights, they were not constructed in earnest until the years just prior to America's entry into World War I and in the decades that followed. By then, vacant lots in the residential community were scattered in groups of five or six, making apartment building development a better investment for developers than the traditional row house building pattern of the previous decades. In addition, a housing shortage in the city led to a great demand for apartment buildings. Given its proximity to the city and its convenience along the streetcar line, Columbia Heights proved to be a prime market for such development.

Park Road Courts was constructed near the beginning of this transition on a large and undeveloped lot of land in the block just east of Fourteenth Street. Designed by the architectural firm of Hunter & Bell, the Park Road Courts building was a real estate venture of developer John L. Warren. A lawyer by training, Warren was, by 1916, an already well-established real estate developer in the city, regularly collaborating with the design team of Hunter and Bell. For this site, the team built what has been categorized in the Multiple Property Document on apartment buildings as a "Conventional Low-Rise Apartment Building." Hunter and Bell designed the building in a Classical Revival style that was in keeping with the tenets of the period's City Beautiful movement that manifested itself beyond the federal enclave and moved into the city's neighborhoods. Buff brick, rather than red brick, regularity of design, and the use of Classical elements, as displayed at the Park Road Courts building were all characteristics of this Post Victorian design aesthetic.

From the beginning, a major selling point of the Park Road Courts was its location near the intersection of Park Road and 14th Street. As the surrounding neighborhood and 14th Street continued to develop, the Park Road Courts remained a successful housing option for middle-class families, offering ready access to stores, restaurants and the theater.

Evaluation

The Park Road Courts apartment building meets D.C. Designation Criterion D (Architecture and Urbanism) and National Register Criterion A (History) and Criterion C (Architecture). In particular, the Park Road Courts illustrates the first phase in the transformation of the Columbia Heights neighborhood from an enclave of the city's wealthier residents housed in substantial single-family dwellings, to a less elite and more middle-class neighborhood where more moderate-priced row houses and apartment buildings were integrated with the neighborhood's older building stock.

Further, the Park Road Courts building is a good example of a speculative middle-class apartment building type that was constructed in the first quarter of the 20th century to accommodate the city's housing needs. The building perfectly meets the definition of the **Conventional Low Rise Apartment Building Sub-Type** as described in the Multiple Property Document, *Apartment Buildings in Washington, D.C., 1880-1945*: the building is between two and four stories, it has a single main public entry, does not contain an elevator, and it has at least five self-sufficient dwelling units. The Conventional Low Rise Apartment Building is a common building type found throughout the District, and is well represented in the Columbia Heights neighborhood. The Park Road Courts is neither a unique, nor an extraordinary example of its type. However, it is a *good representative* example of the sub-type and for that reason qualifies for designation. Although original porches have been enclosed on the building, these porches are not character-defining features of the building's Classical Revival style and thus do not compromise it.

The Period of Significance for the Park Road Courts apartment building begins and ends in 1916, the year the building was constructed. The building retains its integrity of location, setting, design, workmanship, materials, feeling and association and conveys the qualities for which the property is deemed significant. Sufficient time has lapsed to permit for professional evaluation of the property.